

Message Text

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ACTION NEA-10

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H-01 INR-07 L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 PRS-01

SP-02 SS-15 USIA-06 OMB-01 TRSE-00 EB-07 COME-00

AGRE-00 AID-05 /084 W

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FM AMEMBASSY COLOMBO

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 7612

INFO AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI

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TAGS: PINT, CE

SUBJ: THE SRI LANKA FREEDOM PARTY (SLFP) CAMPAIGN

1. SUMMARY: WITH THE PRIME MINISTER MAKING PERSONAL APPEARANCES AROUND THE ISLAND, THE SLFP CAMPAIGN HAS PICKED UP SOME MOMENTUM; MOST OF HER MINISTERS BY CONTRAST ARE CONCENTRATING ON THEIR OWN CONSTITUENCIES. INSISTING THAT THE UNP HAS ONLY CHANGED ITS REHETORIC AND IS AS CAPITALIST AS IN THE PAST, THE SLFP IS RUNNING ON ITS ECONOMIC ACHIEVEMENTS OF THE PAST SEVEN YEARS. UNHAPPINESS WITH THE CHOICE OF CANDIDATES HAS LED TO A FEW DEFECTIONS FROM THE PARTY; SOME OF THE CANDIDATES ARE FORMER CORPORATION HEADS AND DISGRUNTLED UNP'ERS. ONE OF THE MOST PROMINENT SLFP'ERS RUNNING THIS YEAR IS THE PM'S SON WHOSE INEPT CAMPAIGN IS DOING THE PARTY NO GOOD. END SUMMARY.

2. THE MOST WIDELY-DISTRIBUTED DOGMA IN COLOMBO TODAY IS THAT THE CAMPAIGN OF THE SLFP, FALTERING AND UNORGANIZED AS OF NOMINATION DAY, HAS NOW SURGED FORWARD. EVEN THE PRIME MINISTER HAS REFERRED TO THE UNDERDOG POSITION IN WICH HER

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PARTY BEGAN THE CAMPAIGN BUT NOW CONFIDENTLY PREDICTS THAT, COME JULY 21, HER SLFP WILL BE SWEEPED BACK TO POWER. MORE IMPARTIAL OBSERVERS WOULD NOT GO THAT FAR, BUT THE PRESENCE OF THE PRIME MINISTER IN MORE THAN HALF OF THE 160 CONSTITUENCIES SO FAR HAS HELPED TO BOOST THE PARTY CAMPAIGN. DAUGHTER CHANDRIKA WAS REPORTED TO BE GOING HOUSE TO HOUSE IN THE PM'S ELECTORATE AND EVEN SON-IN-LAW KUMAR RUPASINGHE, MORE OR LESS

RETIRED FROM ACTIVE POLITICS, HAS ADDRESSED AT LEAST ONE CAMPAIGN MEETING RECENTLY. FINANCE MINISTER FELIX DIAS BANDARANAIAKE HAS RETURNED FROM LONDON TO ADD HIS OWN ORATORICAL TALENTS TO THE FRAY. (HOWEVER, HIS WIFE HAS PROVED TO BE A LIABILITY; HER ALLEGED HIGH-HANDEDNESS AT DOMPE GENERAL HOSPITAL HAS SPARKED A DOCTOR'S STRIKE THERE AND REAMS OF BAD PUBLICITY IN COLOMBO.)

3. DESPITE THE FLURRY OF RECENT CAMPAIGN ACTIVITY, THE SLFP IS STILL ACTING LIKE AN UNDERDOG. IN CONTRAST TO THE UNP, WHICH HAS SEVERAL CAMPAIGN TEAMS COVERING THE ISLAND, THE ONLY ACTIVE COUNTRY-WIDE CAMPAIGNER FOR THE SLFP IS THE PRIME MINISTER. ALL OTHER PARTY LUMINARIES, INCLUDING THE PARTY'S DEPUTY LEADER, MAITHRIPALA SENANAYAKE AND POLITICAL STRATEGIST FELIX DIAS BANDARANAIAKE, ARE TIED DOWN MOST OF THE TIME TO THEIR CONSTITUENCIES -- MORE CONCERNED WITH POLLING A RESPECTABLE VOTE FOR THEMSELVES THAN BOOSTING SOME OF THEIR WEAKER PARTY MEMBERS. CONSEQUENTLY, THEY ARE ALSO RECEIVING SLIGHT PRESS PLAY. THE PM HERSELF, HOWEVER, IS A GREAT ASSET TO THE SLFP CAMPAIGN. HER CAMPAIGN APPEARANCES AROUND THE ISLAND DRAW GOOD CROWDS OF ADMIRERS AND PROBABLY CURIOSITY-SEEKERS. (SHE HAS RECENTLY BEEN PLAGUED WITH WALKOUTS FROM HER SPEECHES, WHICH COULD WELL HAVE BEEN ORGANIZED BY THE OPPOSITION.)

4. THE UNSTATED THEME OF THE SLFP CAMPAIGN MIGHT BE PARALIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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PHASED AS "WE HAVE TURNED THE CORNER, ECONOMICALLY AND SOCIALLY, TOWARD A PROSPEROUS AND FREE SRI LANKA. DON'T LET THE UNP TURN THE CALENDAR BACK." PLATFORM SPEAKERS EXTOLL SEVEN YEARS OF MAJOR ACHIEVEMENTS AND WARN THAT THE UNP IS LIKELY TO RETURN NATIONALIZED LAND TO THE FORMER OWNERS AND TURN THE COUNTRY OVER TO FOREIGN INTERESTS. THE UNP'S FREE TRADE ZONE PROPOSAL HAS DRAWN THIS SORT OF FIRE IN LINE WITH THE CONSTANT SLFP CAMPAIGN THEME THAT THE UNP HAS NOT CHANGED ITS CAPITALIST STRIPES. THE PM POINTS WITH PRIDE TO LAND REFORM, THE MAHAVELI RIVER DIVERSION SCHEME, RURAL ELECTRIFICATION, AND THE PROVISION OF EMPLOYMENT TO 400,000 PEOPLE OVER THE PAST SEVEN YEARS OF HER GOVERNMENT. WHAT COMPARABLE ACHIEVEMENTS, SHE ASKS, CAN UNP GOVERNMENTS OF THE PAST CLAIM? SHE SUGGESTS THAT IT IS THE SUCCESS OF HER GOVERNMENT'S MAHAVELI IRRIGATION SCHEME WHICH HAS ALLOWED THE RICE RATION TO BE INCREASED FROM TWO TO FOUR POUNDS PER ADULT PER WEEK. SIMILARLY, THE RECENT 20 PERCENT REVALUATION OF THE RUPEE WAS MADE POSSIBLE BY THE NEW ECONOMIC STRENGTH OF SRI LANKA.

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5. BUT DESPITE THEIR PUBLIC OPTIMISM, THE PRIME MINISTER AND HER POLITICAL ADVISERS ARE WELL AWARE THAT PUBLIC DISSATISFACTION WITH THE PRESENT ECONOMIC STAGNATION, THE HIGH COST OF LIVING, AND THE PERPETUALLY HIGH LEVELS OF UNEMPLOYMENT MAKE INCUMBENCY A VERY MIXED BLESSING. WITH THE 1970 UNITED FRONT ALLIANCE BROKEN UP AND, IN ITS PLACE, BAD FEELINGS ALL AROUND, THIS DOES NOT ON THE SURFACE APPEAR TO BE A PROPITIOUS YEAR TO REVERSE THE HISTORICAL TREND OF VICTORIES BY THE OPPOSITION.

6. ANOTHER OF THE SLFP'S PROBLEMS IS ITS CANDIDATE LIST. SEVERAL MP'S THOUGHT IT NECESSARY TO SWITCH THEIR SEATS TO ONES PRESUMED MORE SAFE. IN THE SHUFFLE, LONG-TIME PARTY ORGANIZERS WERE TOSSED ASIDE. IN KANDY TOWN CONSTITUENCY, FOR INSTANCE, THE WOULD-BE SLFP CANDIDATE, REJECTED BY THE PARTY AT THE LAST MOMENT, IS NOW RUNNING AS AN INDEPENDENT SUPPORTED BY SOME IN THE LOCAL PARTY HIERARCHY WHO RESIGNED IN PROTEST. A PARTY HOPEFUL DISPLACED BY THE PM'S SON IN NUWARA ELIYA IS ALSO CONTESTING AS AN INDEPENDENT. THE SLFP MP FOR WELIGAMA WAS DROPPED THIS YEAR AND PROMPTLY CAME OUT IN SUPPORT OF THE UNP CANDIDATE, MONTAGUE JAYAWICKREMA.

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7. IN ITS SEARCH FOR SAFE CANDIDATES, THE SLFP TAPPED AT LEAST SIX GOVERNMENT SERVANTS, INCLUDING THE CHAIRMEN OF SUCH HAPLESS GOVERNMENT VENTURES AS SALU SALA (TEXTILE IMPORTS),

THE JUTE CORPORATION, AND THE FISHERIES CORPORATION. THE SECRETARY TO THE MINISTRY OF EDUCATION, THE GOVERNMENT AGENT OF KANDY, AND A DIRECTOR OF EDUCATION ALL RESIGNED TO CONTEST THE ELECTION. IN THREE OF THE FEW CONSTITUENCIES WHERE THE SLFP IS NOT RUNNING A CANDIDATE, THE PARTY IS SUPPORTING INDEPENDENTS -- IN ONE CASE JINADASA NIYATHAPALA, A FORMER UNP'ER EXPELLED FROM THE PARTY LAST YEAR FOR INDISCIPLINE, AND IN THE OTHER TWO CASES, FORMER SLFP MP'S WHO SUFFER THE SITGMA OF HAVING BEEN CONVICTED OF BRIBERY BY A GOVERNMENT COMMISSION IN 1960. IN ADDITION TO NIYATHAPALA, CONTESTING AS AN INDEPENDENT, THE SLFP IS RUNNING NO LESS THAN FOUR CANDIDATES WHO WERE THROWN OUT OF THE UNP IN 1975 AND WHO LATER SUPPORTED THE SHORT-LIEVED REBEL CAMPAIGN OF RUKMAN SENANAYAKE AND HIS "DUDLEY FRONT."

8. IN ADDITION TO ITS OTHER TROUBLES, THE SLFP'S MOST PROMINENT NEW CANDIDATE HAS PROVED TO BE MORE OF A LIABILITY THAN AN ASSET. ANURA BANDARANAIKE, THE PM'S SON, SUFFERED FROM THE FIRST BECAUSE OF THE INVIDIOUS COMPARISON WITH SANJAY GANDHI'S DISASTROUS ENTRY INTO POLITICS. THE COMPARISON HAS NOT BEEN DULLED BY ANURA'S ACTIONS. EARLY IN THE CAMPAIGN, HE ATTEMPTED TO HAVE TRANSFERRED THE SUPERINTENDENT OF POLICE FROM HIS CONSTITUENCY IN NUWARA ELIYA, A MOVE THAT WAS QUICKLY ABORTED BY A PROTEST STRIKE OF POLICEMEN. THEN, ANURA WAS WIDELY QUOTED AS COMPLAINING OF HOOTING AT HIS MEETINGS, AND AS WARNING THAT IF SUCH DISORDER CONTINUED, HIS MOTHER WOULD POSTPONE ELECTIONS, PERHAPS INDEFINITELY. WHEN ONE OF ANURA'S BRANCH CAMPAIGN OFFICES WAS APPARENTLY RANSACKED BY OPPONENTS, CYNICS COMMENTED THAT THE RAID AND THE FRONT-PAGE PUBLICITY IN THE ANURA-ORIENTED DAILY MIRROR SMACKED OF PRE-PLANNING. AND RECENT RUMORS HAVE MALICIOUSLY REVIVED ANURA'S UNLIKELY LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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REPUTATION AS AN AMOROUS PLAYBOY. THE WIDE-SPREAD PUBLIC INTEREST IN THE NUWARA ELIYA RACE AND THE CONSEQUENT ATTENTION PAID TO ANURA'S MISADVENTURES - REAL AND SUPPOSED - CAN ONLY LEND CREDENCE TO THE UNP'S CRITICISM OF WHAT IS CALLED HERE "FAMILY-BANDYISM."

9. ONE SIDELIGHT DRAWN FROM SLFP PARTY ACTIVITIES IS CONFIRMATION OF THE FINAL DISAPPEARANCE OF THE JANAVEGAYA GROUP OF THE SLFP. ONLY A FEW YEARS AGO A PRIME CONTENDER FOR POWER WITHIN THE PARTY, THE JANAVEGAYA, OR SO-CALLED MAOSIT WING, SUFFERED TWO SERIOUS BLOWS. ONE WAS THE WITHDRAWAL FROM THE PARTY AND THE FACTION OF NANDA ELLAWALA AND THREE SIMILARLY-MINDED DISSIDENT M.P.'S EARLY THIS YEAR. THE OTHER WAS THE WITHDRAWAL FROM ACTIVE POLITICS, POSSIBLY CONNECTED TO HIS CURRENT MARITAL PROBLEMS, OF KUMAR RUPASINGHE, SON-IN-LAW OF THE PM AND LEADER OF THE JANAVEGAYA GROUP. WHERE ONCE YOUNG ASPIRANTS TO POLITICAL POWER FLOCKED TO KUMAR'S SIDE, TODAY HE IS ONLY OCCASIONALLY HEARD FROM AND THE JANAVEGAYA NAME

IS NEVER USED. KUMAR'S TWO NEWSPAPERS HAVE LONG SINCE CEASED
PUBLICATIN. HIS INCIPIENT REBEL TRADE UNION ORGANIZATION WAS
TAKEN BY ELLAWALA WHEN HE BROKE WITH THE PARTY. ONLY IN THE
LAKE HOUSE PRESS GROUP IS THERE STILL AN INFLUENTIAL GROUP
IDENTIFIED WITH THE OLD JANAVEGAYA FACTION. THERE IS CER-
TAINLY NO BODY OF SLFP CANDIDATES WHO OWE LOYALTY TO KUMAR
OR TO THE JANAVEGAYA.

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